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KUWAIT-IRAQ RELATIONS, SHI'A
SUBJECT: SENIOR KUWAITI SHI'A CLERIC ON HIZBALLAH, IRAQ,
IRAN, AND SUNNI CHARITY ORGANIZATIONS

REF: A. KUWAIT 3618
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 630

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: In a September 13 meeting with PolOff, senior Kuwaiti Shi'a cleric Sayed Mohammed Bager Al-Mohri shared his views on regional developments and Shi'a-Sunni relations in Kuwait. Al-Mohri said Hizballah was more popular among Kuwaiti Shi'a than before the recent Israel-Hizballah conflict. Downplaying the fears voiced by some Salafis, he claimed the conflict had also brought Shi'a and Sunnis in Kuwait closer together, since many Sunnis came to sympathize with Hizballah. Al-Mohri said he supported the creation of a largely independent Shi'a region in southern Iraq, a development which he argued would not/not negatively impact Kuwait. On Iran, Al-Mohri said he believed President Ahmadinejad would remain in power until the next elections, but would not be re-elected. He explained that Ahmadinejad had made numerous enemies due to his policies and did not have the support of "the street." Al-Mohri supported the Russian government's designation of the Social Reform Society (SRS) and the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) as terrorist organizations and urged the U.S. to continue monitoring these charities. End summary.

Hizballah More Popular than Ever

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Senior Kuwaiti Shi'a cleric Sayed Mohammed Bager Al-Mohri told PolOff during a September 13 meeting that U.S. support for Israel during the latter's recent conflict with Hizballah had "definitely" damaged the image of the U.S. among Kuwait's generally pro-American Shi'a population. (Note: Approximately thirty percent of Kuwait's one million citizens are Shi'a. End note.) Overall, Kuwaiti Shi'a were more supportive of Hizballah and Hassan Nasrallah after the conflict than before, Al-Mohri claimed. He noted that even many Sunnis in Kuwait, including Islamists like Member of Parliament Waleed Al-Tabtabaei and Ummah Party leader/columnist Dr. Sajed Al-Abdali, had defended Hizballah's actions and were now more sympathetic towards the Shi'a. Al-Mohri downplayed some Kuwaitis' criticisms of Hizballah and warnings of rising Iranian influence in the region, commenting that Shi'a-Sunni relations in Kuwait were better now than before the conflict. (Comment: Other contacts have argued the opposite, claiming that rising sectarian violence in Iraq, the possible emergence of a largely autonomous Shi'a state in southern Iraq, and the increasingly bellicosity of Iran are making Sunnis in Kuwait, particularly Islamists, very nervous. Those Sunni Islamists in Kuwait that did publicly support Hizballah were primarily

affiliated with the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood and the Ummah (Nations) Party, a controversial Salafi political association. End comment.)

Federalism Not Fatalism

13. (C/NF) Al-Mohri said he supported the creation of a largely autonomous Shi'a region in southern Iraq. He argued this would not have a negative impact on Kuwait, noting that many of Iraq's top leaders were already Shi'a and this had not affected Kuwait-Iraq relations. Kuwait had a "special set up," he explained: Kuwait's Shi'a population was well-integrated into the society and Shi'a-Sunni relations were generally good. Except for a few pro-Iran Shi'a, Al-Mohri claimed the majority of Kuwaiti Shi'a were moderate, loyal Kuwaiti citizens. (Comment: Many of our contacts echo this point: Kuwaiti Shi'a are Kuwaiti first and Shi'a second. When compared to Shi'a-Sunni relations elsewhere in the region, Shi'a in Kuwait are indeed very well-off, as Al-Mohri claimed. Where overt tensions do exist they are primarily between the more hard-line, pro-Iran Shi'a and conservative, Salafi Sunni Islamists. End comment.) Al-Mohri, who allegedly has the right to collect khums (Shi'a religious tax) for Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani in Kuwait, claimed Al-Sistani was concerned about rising sectarian violence in Iraq and said he believed Al-Sistani would also support a largely autonomous Shi'a region in southern Iraq. Moqtada Al-Sadr, on the other hand, was opposed to discussing an autonomous Shi'a region as long as Iraq was "under occupation," Al-Mohri said.

Ahmadinejad Going the Distance

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14. (C/NF) Turning to Iran, Al-Mohri said he believed Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would remain in power until the next elections in 2009, but would not be re-elected. He claimed Ahmadinejad had made a lot of enemies through his economic policies and by replacing many highly-placed people with hard-liners. Asked if these ousted leaders represented a serious opposition to Ahmadinejad, Al-Mohri said they were more of a balance than an opposition to the President. "The U.S. mistakenly views the Iranian regime as synonymous with Ahmadinejad," Al-Mohri advised. "There are many other, more moderate people (within the Iranian government)." Al-Mohri did not believe the hard-liners, led by Ahmadinejad, had the support of "the street," noting that some women in Tehran still do not wear the hijab in public.

Continue Charity Oversight

15. (C/NF) As PolOff was leaving, Al-Mohri pulled him aside and said he supported the Russian government's designation of the Social Reform Society (SRS) and the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), both Sunni Islamist charities, as terrorist organizations. He urged the U.S. to continue monitoring these charity organizations, which he believed were funding illicit activities overseas; he did not specifically say "terrorism," though this was certainly the implication. The U.S. should carefully "monitor the flow of money" out of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, Al-Mohri concluded.

Bio Note

16. (C/NF) Though always civil, Al-Mohri, the Secretary General of the Shi'a Clerics Congregation, was more open and friendly in this meeting than in previous encounters, perhaps an indication that he is relatively pleased with the course of events in the region. He only lightly admonished the U.S. to avoid "negative policies," like supporting Israel's

attacks on Lebanon, which give America's enemies a pretext for fighting against the U.S. Al-Mohri recently returned from Frankfurt, Germany where he underwent an operation on his left eye for a condition related to "blue fluid." According to several contacts, including Al-Mohri himself, Al-Mohri is the representative of Iraqi cleric Ali Al-Sistani in Kuwait and is authorized to collect khums (Shi'a religious tax) on his behalf. Al-Mohri also claims to have close connections to many of Iran's top leaders, including Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani. Al-Mohri seems to relish his connections and regularly drops names in meetings. For example, when discussing Iraq, he casually mentioned that Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim had called him "two days ago" from Najaf, Iraq.

17. (SBU) In an interview published in the Arabic-daily Al-Watan on September 13, Al-Mohri strongly criticized Al-Qaeda and condemned terrorism in general. The following is a translation of the article.

Begin text:

Secretary General of the Shi'a Clerics Congregation Mohammed

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Baqer Al-Mohri stated that the threat made by Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the number two man in the Al-Qaeda organization, to the Gulf countries proves the infidelity, apostasy, and murderous nature of this cursed person who does not accept the Islamic Shari'a that prohibits intimidating and terrorizing people. This proves that Al-Qaeda is an apostate and atheistic organization that has departed from Islam. It also proves the criminal, Satanic, and retaliatory spirit of this organization, which fights Muslims and Islamic states in the service of the criminal, Zionist masters. Everyone knows that the leader of this organization, Shaykh Osama bin Laden, is licentious and debaucherous; has spent his life serving colonialism and committing grave offenses and sins; was an agent for a known foreign party; and has never believed in Allah, though he and Al-Zawahiri try to pretend to be religious and jealous of Islam.

His (Zawahiri's) last statement against Muslims and their rulers in the Gulf States has uncovered the presence of the Satanic leadership of the terrorist Al-Qaeda organization, which is responsible for murdering thousands of innocent people in various parts of the world. The Kuwaiti government

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should take the statements of this malignant man seriously and monitor economic and other installations, suspicious gatherings, and places related to the groups sympathizing with bin Laden. Imams of mosques and scholars should propagate awareness among the ranks of the youth so they won't be taken away and dragged by the misleading Al-Qaeda organization, the soldiers of Satan and the followers of the Jews who are hostile to Islam and Muslims.

Let all know that the Al-Qaeda organization serves the goals of the Zionists who want to weaken and undermine the Muslims and rulers. Therefore, beware of sympathizing with them because they are disbelievers and agents working against Islam, and whoever sympathizes with them or supports them is considered an accessory to them in their Satanic acts and terrorist operations.

End text.

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